

i want your complications too

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/29438073) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/29438073>.

Rating:

[Teen And Up Audiences](#)

Archive Warning:

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Category:

[F/M](#)

Fandoms:

[Superman - All Media Types](#), [Superman \(Comics\)](#)

Relationships:

[Clark Kent/Lois Lane](#), [Kon-El | Conner Kent & Lois Lane](#), [Clark Kent & Kon-El | Conner Kent](#)

Characters:

[Lois Lane](#), [Clark Kent](#), [Kon-El | Conner Kent](#)

Additional Tags:

[Single Parent Clark Kent](#), [Alternate Universe - Kon Gets Out of Cadmus as a Child](#), [Fluff](#), [Valentine's Day](#)

Language:

[English](#)

Series:

Part 1 of [Single Dad Clark AU](#)

Stats:

Published: 2021-02-14 Words: 5,167 Chapters: 1/1

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Summary

When Lois gets roped into dropping off some files at Clark's apartment, she discovers he has a kid. Seven-year-old Conner may just win her heart (for his dad) yet.

Notes

I love Clois, and I love Kon. I would love to more fully develop this AU, but I don't have time. Maybe I'll write a sequel at some point. I'm on tumblr at [spideylovesgwendy](#)!

Jimmy was the one who had offered to bring Clark his files, but one semi-emergency later, the files wound up in Lois's hand.

"I'm really, really sorry," Jimmy said, and that little fucker looked it too. Lois supposed she couldn't be too mad when Jimmy did just break his arm in an unconfirmed LexCorp incident, but she could try. "Perry really wants Clark to validate these sources for an upcoming piece, but he couldn't make it in. I promised I'd bring them."

"Yeah, yeah," Lois sighed. She took the files from Jimmy's good arm and stuck them in her bag. "I'll make sure Smallville gets his stuff. You know you owe me?"

"I owe you a lot," Jimmy grumbled.

Lois quirked her lips. "True!" She spun on her heels and walked out what remained of the front lobby into the cold January air. Jimmy was getting the attention he needed from the medics, so he didn't need her, and she wanted to make her delivery and head home. Cup noodles were calling her name.

Clark Kent didn't live too out of the way, at least, though Lois had quickly channeled her ire onto *him* instead. What was so urgent that he couldn't come into the office? Was he sick? Ditching? He seemed too goody-goody for that, but she was praying it was something minor and totally avoidable that she could easily blame him for.

When she arrived at the building Jimmy had directed her to, she headed to the fourth floor, two steps at a time. The name *Kent* was written on a card next to the door in Sharpie. Could have been a worse apartment, she figured, considering what the starting salary at the Planet was like. Hell, even with two years' experience, the salary had to be a pittance. Kent must have gotten lucky to find a place like that. She thought of her own tiny box space and briefly wondered if she should consider looking for somewhere better.

Nah. She was hardly ever home, and with just her, she didn't need anything nicer. Smallville was probably used to the big houses out in Kansas, even being single.

She leaned on the doorbell for three seconds, then stepped back. Behind the door, a thunk rang out, and then the sound of scampering feet. Jeez. Who taught the guy to walk? She rolled her eyes just in time for the door to open, Clark Kent with his glasses haphazardly on his nose, an old t-shirt a little too tight on his shoulders—hm. Noted.

“Lois?” he asked, in that soft, Midwestern drawl. Something about it always sounded wrong to Lois. Not wrong, really—more put on. Like he was trying to sound the part of an all-American boy, even if that concept was outdated by more than a few years. There was something about him that Lois couldn’t gauge yet. “What are you doing here?”

She fanned the files towards his face. “Jimmy has me dropping these off for you. Kid broke his arm.”

Clark furrowed his brow. “Oh, no. Is he okay?” He straightened his glasses and his back, and Lois, belatedly, realized that, yeah, Kent was pretty tall. Strange how she’d never noticed. Then again, they were almost always at their desks in the office.

“He’s fine. Just got caught in the crossfire. Anyway, these are for you. I heard Perry wants them fast, so don’t try to take too much time off, okay?” Lois asked, already impatient. If he wanted to know how Jimmy was, it was better to ask him himself.

“Gotcha,” Clark said with a nod. He thumbed over the files, head bent.

“Dad!”

Lois froze. Clark’s face paled.

“Dad, you gotta come *back*! I wasn’t done!”

Her brow slowly raised. He smiled sheepishly. Behind him, a small kid barreled forward, stumbling until he crashed into Clark’s legs.

“Conner,” Clark said sharply, a turn in his voice. The drawl shifted into something more natural, with more mettle behind the tones. Lois took note.

“Sorry, Dad,” the boy—Conner—said. He peered around the man’s legs to look at Lois. In some ways, he was the spitting image of Clark, with those dark waves and a sharpness about his nose, even at his age. But his eyes were different, less astonishingly blue with flecks of green and gray, maybe. “Who are you?” he asked, blunt.

Lois liked this kid. “I’m Lois Lane. I work with this guy,” she said, nodding in Clark’s direction.

“Oh. At the boring paper,” Conner said. “Want to see my glasses?”

“Your glasses?”

“Conner.”

Conner paid Clark no mind, turning around to show off three pairs of sunglasses, each vastly different. He dangled a sparkly pink pair in the air first. “I got these for not punching anyone at school for a week.”

“Uh-huh,” Lois said.

“It’s a big improvement,” Clark assured.

“I got these because Dad forgot to make corn for dinner,” Conner continued with a set of bright blue Raybans.

“How dare he?”

“I know!” Conner said indignantly. “And I got *these*”—dangling a lovely pair of round sunglasses—“as a birthday gift.”

“Oh,” Lois said, feigning interest as best as she could. She was interested—just not in the sunglasses themselves. “When was your birthday?”

“Uh.” Conner spluttered and furrowed his brow, one little hand curled by his mouth. He turned to look at Clark.

“June,” Clark supplied. “June 3rd. He turned seven.”

“Yeah! I’m seven!” Conner agreed, crossing his arms over his chest. It was kind of cute, the way he tried to seem so big and tough, surreptitiously sliding a pair of sunglasses on his nose. Unlike his dad, his hair was loose and fluffy.

Lois didn’t like kids. But she thought this one was okay. “Nice to meet you, Conner.”

“You too, babe!” Conner said, tilting his sunglasses down with a wink.

Clark blanched, then flushed. “I— I don’t know where he learned that.”

“Clearly not from you.” Lois stifled her laughter. Okay, she kind of loved this kid. What spunk. Either his other parent was a spitfire, or Smallville was holding something back. Maybe both. Her investigative senses were tingling, and she opened her mouth, ready to grill Clark for all he was worth.

“Gee, it was so nice of you to drop this off, Lois, but I think it’s

Conner's bathtime. Thank you so much! I'll try to be back at work tomorrow. Take care!" Clark said, somehow both bashful and forceful at the same time, drawing a clear line between the apartment and the outside world as he slammed the door.

Oh, like that was going to stop Lois Lane.

Reading up on Clark Kent, Lois didn't learn much that she couldn't have guessed. Raised in Smallville, Kansas by Jonathan and Martha (Clark) Kent, he was adopted after being abandoned on the side of the road. His high school transcript was adequate, with As in English and journalism, Bs in most other classes. He'd attended Metropolis University, graduated with a degree in three years, simultaneously building up his reputation as a freelancer before landing the gig at the Planet. During high school, he'd dated a girl called Lana Lang, but she didn't seem like the right fit for Conner's parent. Neither did his college girlfriend, Lori Lemaris. Lois was debating the ethics of performing a genetic test on Conner without his or Clark's permission when Clark asked her to lunch.

Normally, Lois would have politely (if brusquely) turned him down. Smallville wasn't exactly her type, with his bashful demeanor and clumsy hands, even if he was a very, very sweet guy. But the situation with Conner intrigued her. She'd never imagined Clark was the type to have a kid out of good ol' wedlock.

"So how long has Conner been in Metropolis?" Lois asked. The coffee at the diner Clark picked was passable, good enough to wash down the greasiness of the food. She was pretty sure she'd need that to get up and running for the rest of the day.

"Conner?" Clark repeated.

Lois paused. "Your son?" she prompted.

Clark's eyes widened. "Oh! Right, um." He faltered. "Conner... came to live with me about three months ago."

"Is that so?" Lois was prepared to grill him for all he was worth, but something told her Clark was getting ready to clam up. If she knew one thing about Clark Kent after working with him the past two years, it was that Clark could hold his tongue when he wanted to. Lois had to respect that. No halfway decent reporter could get very far if they didn't learn when to talk and when to shut their trap.

“He’s settled in pretty well. He really likes it here. School’s a little rough,” Clark said, expertly changing the subject. She let it go for now.

“Yeah, he did mention getting glasses for not punching a kid.” Lois smiled.

Clark winced. “He’s got a bit of a temper. He’s very... emotional, in general. We’ve been working on ways for him to channel his anger more positively. It helps for him to have something to look forward to.”

“Cute,” Lois said. “You never mentioned him before.”

Clark sipped his coffee, the movement of his hand fluid and smooth. He had nice hands. Large and strong, followed by the strong muscles of his forearms. Even after so long off the farm, he still looked the picture of a solid farmboy, dressed up in a baggy suit. If that was Lois’s type, she would have been all over him. “You’re writing the piece on the new LexCorp enterprise, aren’t you?”

“Ah-ah. You want info, you gotta give. I scratch your back, you scratch mine,” Lois said.

“You first,” Clark prompted. He did not say ladies first. Lois appreciated that.

“Alright. Yeah, I am. Your turn.” Beat that, Smallville. She wouldn’t give up any more than she had to.

“I didn’t know he existed,” he replied.

Ugh. Okay, so two could play this game. “They acquired Cadmus Labs through a subsidiary about eighteen months ago.”

Clark’s brow twitched. He had a good poker face, but he was thinking about something. “Interesting.”

Lois nodded. “Where’d Conner live before?”

“In his other parent’s care,” Clark said. Parent, not mother. The distinction was interesting, as was the phrasing. Lois would consider what that meant.

“I’m fairly sure Cadmus was doing LexCorp work earlier. Only they wanted to be sure that if things went sour, they could toss off the

blame,” she said.

“Sounds like LexCorp.”

“That it does. Do you have sole custody?”

“Now? Yes.”

The bell dangling over the door jingled as some patrons walked out. Clark took another bite of his burger, a stripe of red ketchup on his upper lip. Lois stopped herself from wiping it off.

“Hey. Why don’t you and Conner come over for dinner sometime?” she asked, mouth moving without prompting. *What?*

“Come over? Like, to your place?” Clark spluttered.

“Yes,” Lois said. Why was she saying this? “I’ll cook, and we can hang. It’d be good for him to get out, right?”

Clark looked hesitant. Of course he did. It was obvious there was no other reason she invited them over other than to get some details. This was stupid.

She tried a different tactic. “Clark, you can trust me. We’re friends, right? It’s not weird to get to know your son.”

The word *son* had a profound effect. His whole demeanor shifted, until his face was less, “Gee, Lois, I don’t know how I spilled coffee all over my tie,” more the man who’d marched up to Lex Luthor to get the quote of a lifetime for their first shared byline. *This* was the Clark Kent Lois wanted to see more. *This* was a man who could hold his own against. Lois kinda liked this man. “Okay,” he agreed. “When?”

“Tomorrow. Seven. It’s a Friday. I’ll go shopping after work today and get everything I need.” Lois wasn’t a great cook, but she was pretty sure she could figure something out. Kids didn’t tend to have refined palates, right?

Clark smiled a little wider. Somehow, his smile seemed less like those old, “wholesome” hand-painted ads now, more like sunshine. Something in the shell that was the whole Clark Kent, Kansas hometown boy, persona had cracked. “We’ll see you then.”

When Lois was fourteen, she’d said she never wanted to get married. Cooking and cleaning? Not her thing. Changing diapers? As if.

“The diapers thing, I’ll give you, Lo, but you know you’ll have to cook and clean for yourself, right?” Lucy, age ten, and almost as much of a smartass as her big sister had remarked. Lois had to admit her sister had been right. Mostly. She was twenty-seven, and she’d done *pretty* good at not cooking for herself, even if she’d had to learn to clean.

The problem with never cooking for herself meant Lois was not prepared to cook for guests either.

“Shit,” she said when she stepped back into the kitchen to check on the spaghetti sauce. What had been a nice saucepan full of tomato and basil was now a thick paste that only just scraped off if she pushed hard enough. Okay. She could heat more sauce. She’d bought a big jar. She reached for the other pot and stirred the noodles. They disintegrated. She blinked. “H— How?”

Lois glanced at the clock. 6:45. Clark would be there soon, considering his timeliness. Damn. How was she possibly going to get things in shape before he arrived?

Ding, Dong.

Answer: She wasn’t.

Lois’s shoulders slumped. She brushed it off. She could order pizza. Everyone liked pizza. It’d be a little late, but things would be fine. Life goes on. Pulling the old red door of her apartment open, she smiled. “Hey, Smallville. Kiddo.”

“Hi!” Conner said. He’d gotten a haircut since the last time they’d met, something more sleek and stylish than Clark’s slicked down mop. He almost looked like a tiny punk, in a leather jacket that *fit* but still looked rather amusing on a kid his size, especially when he carried an ugly stuffed animal that she wasn’t even going to *attempt* to name and a book. “I’m hungry.”

“Conner,” Clark warned. He, on the other hand, looked as cleancut as ever, even if he was wearing a sweater that was only two sizes too big instead of three. Lois thought she could maybe smell a hint of cologne. Weird. Clark was normally the type to complain about perfumes, since he had a sensitive schnozz.

Lois winced. “Ah. About that...”

Clark raised his head. He took a tiny, delicate sniff. “Lois—”

"Don't say anything," she interrupted. "Okay, so I'm not the best cook. Is pizza good?"

"Pizza?" Conner asked, brow furrowed. Weird. What kind of kid doesn't jump at the offer of pizza?

"Let me take a look," Clark said. "Maybe we can salvage it."

"You're welcome to give it a shot," Lois sighed. She slammed the door shut behind her guests and received a hard three thumps from Mrs. Oliver's cane upstairs. Smoothing down her cardigan, she followed Clark into the kitchen.

He reached for the noodles first, wrinkling his nose. His face only scrunched more when he looked at the sauce. "Oh," he said.

"Yeah, I, uh—" Lois gestured vaguely with her hand, loop-de-loop. "Anyway, we can do pizza—"

"Do you have more?" Clark asked, standing a little straighter.

"Yeah, but these are my only pots—"

Clark shook his head. "You wanted to see Conner. Go talk to him. I'll cook," he insisted.

Lois hated to agree so easily, but she was hungry. And the opportunity to interrogate a child with no defenses against her lines of questioning? Impossible to resist. "You sure? You're welcome to use anything in the fridge, but you *are* a guest."

"It's fine," Clark assured, his eyes soft as he smiled at her. They were a striking blue. The curve of his lenses cut into the color and probably changed the shape a little. She wondered how he'd look without them—but something about his glasses was comforting too. "Let me handle this, Lo."

Lois should have told him not to use that nickname. Her heart fluttered. She waved him off as she walked back to the living room on the other side of the counter, where Conner had taken a seat on the couch with his book and stuffed animal-thing. "Hey, kiddo. How's it going?"

"Good," he said. "Dad made me a teddy bear yesterday. A teddy bear is a stuffed toy shaped like a bear, named after the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. Teddy bears were

actually invented in Ger—”

“Woah, cool bear,” Lois said, reaching for his toy before she got into whatever Conner was going on about. She pulled it up in his lap, so she could get a better look at the lumpy green... thing. “This... is a bear?”

“Yes,” Conner said with a quirk of his brow. He snatched it back and held it high. “See?”

Lois looked at the bear. Its ears were a little too large, snout a little too small. Four fangs poked out of its mouth, and its paws were oddly shaped. Lois didn’t even want to start thinking about the tail. “Your dad sewed this himself?”

“Yep,” Conner agreed. He stared at the bear with wide eyes before clutching it tightly to his chest. “It’s my bear.”

“That’s nice, kiddo.” Conner really was cute. Lois could almost see why people wanted kids. “What’s his name?”

“Mik-Jur. It means Cool Kid,” Conner reported.

Mik-Jur. Where did the kid come up with things like that? “Cool. So he’s a cool kid like you, huh?” she asked.

Conner smiled. If Clark’s smile was like sunshine, Conner’s was a rainbow. “Yeah!”

In the kitchen, things were starting to smell decent again. Lois curled her head around. “You okay in there?”

“Golden!” Clark called back. “It’ll be ten minutes.”

Ten minutes sounded good to Lois. Conner deflated.

“Dad, I’m hungry!” he said. He turned around on the couch, perching on his knees and leaning over the back.

“I know, Con, but it takes time to cook,” Clark said.

“But you could just use—”

“Oh, no!” Clark said. “Whoops!” Something banged and clanged.

Lois frowned.

“Oh,” Conner whispered. “Hey, Lois, can I tell you about school? I had a good day.”

“Did you?” Lois asked. She vaguely remembered that she was supposed to be interrogating the kid. But when he opened his mouth to talk about the new friends he was making, her heart softened. He really was a sweet kid. A lot like his dad, in some ways. And his dad was pretty great. When she got a chance, she peered over Conner’s shoulder to Clark standing at the stove.

Smallville didn’t seem like her type, all classic and wonderful in the most boring way possible. He seemed like the type to get the perfect wife and the perfect life and raise 2.5 kids with a true happy ever after.

Then again, hadn’t she learned better over the past couple years? Clark Kent was good at using his appearance to make people think what they wanted about him. He was someone special too.

He turned his head as if he somehow knew she was looking. The smile he shot back at her went right through her heart.

“And then we got to go to art, and we started a new project, and I think mine looks the best,” Conner continued. Lois looked back at him and smiled.

Somehow, she had a feeling she’d gotten herself into more than she’d anticipated. Liking kids was a new thing. But Lois was pretty sure she’d adore Conner.

When Clark finished dinner and called them all to the table, Lois was about ready to propose.

“Seriously, how did you make this with what was in my kitchen, Smallville?” she asked, looking at the spread. He’d turned the leftover pasta and sauce into something rather marvelous, with the addition of some vegetables. The garlic bread was still storebought, but it was garlic bread. It would be good.

“It’s amazing how good things can taste when you actually cook them,” Clark replied. He was tucking Conner into his seat, plating his food, ruffling his son’s hair.

“Dad,” Conner whined. Clark smiled. Lois’s heart skipped a beat.

“Hey, I cook,” she defended. “I did! I cooked before you got here.”

“That’s not called cooking,” Clark said.

“Yeah,” Conner added, probably just to agree with his dad.

Lois rolled her eyes and twirled the pasta around her fork. “Oh, whatever. Sue me for having other interests.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it, Lois. Conner, *eat* the vegetables,” Clark said abruptly.

Conner hesitantly pushed them back onto the center of his plate.

“You are such a dad,” Lois snorted.

“He’s the best dad!” Conner said.

Clark’s eyes glowed. Funny how he seemed so proud if he’d only met Conner a few months ago. They seemed like they were always meant to be father and son.

“The LexCorp story is supposed to run tomorrow,” Lois said. She smiled at Clark. Who said she could never throw the dog a bone? “But I’ll give you a heads up. Looks like Cadmus was working on cloning tech. God knows why Lex Luthor wanted cloning technology. I sure hope we never find out.”

Clark stiffened. “Is that so?” he asked, wiping tomato sauce from his lip.

“It is. Of course, Cadmus had a little ‘incident’ where most of their records were destroyed, and they’re supposedly changing directions under new leadership. But we all know something sketchy was going on in that lab. At least they probably didn’t get anywhere,” she reasoned.

“You’re sure they didn’t finish any projects?” Clark asked.

Lois shook her head. She took another bite. The pasta was really good. Who knew that homecooked food was better? “There’s no evidence of it. I think if they’re made a real clone, they probably would have been shouting from the heavens. We should just be glad they didn’t.”

“Oh,” Conner breathed. His fork slipped from his fingers and fell onto his plate. Lois frowned. The kid sat ramrod straight. Why was he so tense? “Are clones bad?”

Lois frowned. She’d almost forgotten he was there. “Bad? What do you

mean, kiddo?”

“Like... if Lex Luthor makes a clone, is the clone bad because he made it?” Conner asked, his big blue eyes wide.

Something about this conversation had Lois concerned. “Why do you ask?”

“Con—”

“Does it?” he demanded.

Lois paused. “No. A clone wouldn’t be bad because of who made them. Nor would they be bad because of any genetic donors. I just don’t think that sort of technology should be in the hands of a man like Lex Luthor. If anything, I’d feel bad for any clones made there.”

“I’m sure if they existed, Superman would get them out,” Clark said. He leveled his son with a firm look, the kind of warm, fatherly look that could comfort any kid. *I’m here. Nothing will hurt you.*

Conner relaxed and smiled. “Yeah. Superman would save the day. No one would be left behind.”

“Sweet of you to worry so much about the clones,” Lois said. “You know, kiddo, this is why your dad and I write these stories. So good people like Superman know when bad things happen.”

“Exactly. Good people always need to know when things go wrong. It’s how we all know when to step in,” Clark explained. He glanced at Lois meaningfully. “But we don’t need to worry about the clones. I’m sure there are none inside Cadmus anymore.”

Conner nodded slowly. He slurped up a noodle, sauce flicking a line up his face and into his hair. “Oh, man,” he groaned.

“What did I tell you about eating like that? Be careful,” Clark sighed. He leaned over and wiped Conner’s face. “What am I going to do with you?”

“Love me?” Conner asked innocently, a wide, cheeky grin on his face again. Something about it was a little false—the question was tender.

“Of course,” Clark agreed, no hesitation.

Lois had always respected Clark. But somehow, seeing him with Conner—her heart sped, or slowed, or strengthened, the beat against

her ribs something *more*, anyway. Thump, thump, thump. She was glad Clark couldn't hear that, at least. God, how embarrassing.

"You okay, Lois?" he asked casually. Wait, why was he asking? He offered a smile. "You were staring."

"Oh. Nothing. Just thinking about whether Cat might like to run a DILFs of the Daily article," she joked.

Clark blanched. "What's a DILF?" Conner asked. If possible, Clark grew paler.

"You're a terrible influence," he huffed.

"Oh, but that's what makes me so great," Lois replied, all confidence and bluster as she rolled past whatever was going on with her stupid heart.

"Yeah," Clark agreed, ruffling Conner's hair as he turned back to his meal. "It kind of is."

If it were any of her other coworkers' kids, Lois probably wouldn't have seen them again, save for maybe at a holiday party or during one of the late-night call-ins. Somehow, she found herself meeting Clark and Conner on a regular basis. Dinner and milkshakes at Clark's favorite diner, breakfast on Sunday mornings while the adults wrote up their latest article and Conner colored on the menu, tagging along when Clark picked up Conner from school—she didn't know how it had happened, but somehow, Conner had become one of her favorite people.

Clark himself was worming his way in their two.

Lois had always liked Clark, always *respected* him. But this was different. When they took Conner to one of the parks to play and let him run around with other kids on the playground, they lingered together on one of the benches. Lois had grown up all around the world, and she wasn't one to be bothered by extreme weather. Still, the temperature and the wind was enough to make her cheeks flushed, even with her hat and scarf curled up half her face.

Clark, of course, was only wearing a leather jacket and a hat, and his face wasn't even red.

"Oh, you suck, Smallville. This doesn't even bother you," Lois huffed.

Clark grinned, that stupid little grin that was just so him. “Kansas is windy, Lois. I’m used to it.”

Lois puffed out a breath of air and rolled her eyes. He raised his arm and tucked her into his side. Lois wasn’t a tiny woman, but Clark made her feel small against his solid body, the warm scent of his cologne mixed with musky leather from his jacket. His arm was warm, and from this position, he blocked out a fair amount of the wind. She leaned closer. “Conner doesn’t look bothered either.”

“Probably a kid thing,” Clark said. Conner, way ahead of them, swung across the monkey bars, legs dangling in the air. He’d abandoned his coat somewhere, even though the other kids playing with him were bundled up neatly.

“Is that so?” Lois wondered. She added another note to her Kent file.

Clark glanced at his watch and winced. “Oh! I forgot I have to buy Valentines for Conner to hand out at school. For his whole class. He wants to make them all special.”

Lois smiled. “What a sweet kid.” She wondered, secretly, if Conner had a little crush on anyone. Who was to say? Maybe if she was sneaky, she’d get a look at his Valentines and find out. “When are they handing them out?”

“Monday. He even made a little box. It’s really cute. He decorated it himself,” Clark said, beaming with pride.

Lois’s chest warmed. “Cute. Think he’d show it to me?”

“Maybe,” Clark said. “If you stop by before he brings it back to school.”

“How about Sunday?” she suggested.

“Sunday?”

Lois nodded. “Yeah. Maybe you can cook for me again,” she teased. Sort of. Clark was a good cook.

His cheeks were red now. Maybe the wind was finally getting to him. “Um, Sunday, the fourteenth?”

“Sure!” Lois said. She stood, untucking herself from Clark’s side. “Is that okay?”

Clark nodded. “Yeah! Yeah, of course. That’s more than okay. Okay. Sunday.”

“The fourteenth,” Lois repeated, just now realizing where this was going. *Oh*.

Clark’s smile grew a bit shy. Lois smiled back. She waved at Conner as she left.

Sunday night came way too quickly. Lois ran fifteen minutes late debating between her pink and blue dresses. She decided on violet. Violet was her color, after all. Then she debated on the propriety of buying flowers and chocolates. They weren’t *dating*. But it was Valentine’s Day. Clark was cooking, so wasn’t it right for Lois to bring something? If she brought something for Clark, she had to bring something for Conner too.

She arrived thirty minutes past with a small box of chocolates for Conner and a rose for Clark. When Conner opened the door, he yanked the chocolates from Lois’s hands.

“Alright, hazelnut!” Conner cheered. He scampered off, in blue socks against the hardwood.

“Conner, did you just—?” Clark sighed, materializing behind his son. He looked nice, in a neat shirt that actually fit, for once, a lavender that looked— violet. His eyes flickered up to Lois, and he flushed pink. “Hi, Lois.”

“Hey, Clark,” she said softly. “It’s okay. The chocolates were for him.”

“Oh. Good. Still, he should say thank you,” Clark said.

“Thanks!”

Lois laughed. “And this is for you,” she said, offering the rose, perfect and deep red.

Clark took the rose, a dopey smile on his face. “Wow. I— It’s beautiful, Lo.”

She was prepared to stand and smile back like a complete idiot when Conner gagged. “Gross, Dad.”

Clark grew redder. Lois laughed. “Happy Valentine’s to you too, kiddo.”

“Happy Valentine’s,” Conner said through a mouth of chocolate as he flopped onto the floor, rolling his car along the edge of the rug.

Clark stared a moment longer. “Dinner is almost ready,” he said. “Just... letting it... stew.”

The flower must have really flummoxed him. Lois stepped closer and straightened his bowtie. “It’s a good thing you’re a good cook. I like that in a man.”

“Do you?” Clark asked, the bashfulness abating a little, the sort of confidence she was always looking for behind his exterior peeking out again. “I like a woman who knows what she wants.”

“Oh, I know you do,” Lois said. A few weeks ago, this would have been her chance to sink her claws into a story. She could have learned more about whatever secrets Clark Kent was hiding, the truth about Conner. She still could—she’d worn down Clark’s defenses, and those shrewd blue eyes were peering with the depths of his soul.

Instead, she stepped back, Clark’s bowtie straight, and smiled.

One day, Clark would tell her many, many secrets. Today, she kissed his cheek and set the table.

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